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ABSTRACT

The current trend in special education is towards a policy of rapid integration of mildly or moderately disabled children into the regular classroom. The movement towards multi-age grouping, open classrooms, and other varieties of mixed grouping will call for drastic changes in the librarian's repertoire due to the extended heterogeneity of user groups. Accordingly, Louisiana State University in New Orleans has expanded its curriculum in library science by developing a course on library science for the exceptional child. This course explores problems such as the nature of exceptionality and the implications for learning, objectives of the program, physical plant considerations, professional literature, and integrating function. (JA)

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Professional Preparation for School Librarians: The Exceptional Child and the Library

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DESCRIPTION OF AUTHORS

Dr. Baskin is a member of the faculty of the State University of New York at Stony Brook. Her area of specialization is the exceptional child. She has taught and supervised in all areas of exceptionality, has been a consultant for communities involved in evaluating and programming for emotionally disturbed and gifted children, has developed educational materials for use with trainable retarded children, and has testified before state and national committees on education for gifted and retarded children.

Mrs. Harris is a member of the faculty of Louisiana State University in New Orleans. Her area of specialization is library science. She has had extensive experience in media usage as well as in teaching and consultative work. At present she is teaching the course on library services for exceptional children described in the following pages.

Approximately ten per cent of the student population of our schools are considered exceptional. A child so defined "deviates from the average or normal child in mental, physical, or social characteristics to such an extent that he requires a modification of school practices, or special educational services, in order to develop to his maximum capacity."*

To help such a child the librarian must obtain, at minimum, a rudimentary knowledge of the implications of exceptionality and of the curricular and structural consequences which flow from this awareness. Decisions such as the need for modification of the physical facilities, new policies in the selection of books and media, and adjustments in library programs and services will have to be made.

The profession has acknowledged the importance of adapting library practice to serve all children. In recent years, this has been reflected in innumerable articles on the library and the exceptional child. Unfortunately, many of these articles have been hortatory or inspirational in tone; they have not provided much more than cheer and encouragement. Some articles have provided descriptions of individual programs, often effective and imaginative, which have presented a response to one aspect of a specific exceptionality; large print materials for the visually impaired, storytelling projects for the mentally retarded, or biblio-

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*Samuel A. Kirk, Educating Exceptional Children (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), pp. 4-5.

therapeutic techniques for the emotionally disturbed. These offerings varied in relevance and quality; in effect, the total amounted to scattered and patchwork remedies.

Special education programs, by their very nature are structured in a variety of organizational modes which inevitably demand multiple responses by the staff involved. In some school systems, virtually complete segregation is the predominant pattern. In other systems, the special child is housed in regular schools but is restricted to special classes. In still others, the child holds membership in a regular class and/or meets with special teachers for limited periods for development of special skills, such as lipreading or the use of braille, or for special tutroing or counseling. Many districts use segments of these various approaches. If the librarian is working in a school or institution serving children with primarily one exceptionality, and a collection and facilities tailored to their needs, she has one set of constraints and opportunities; if she is in a school which contains children heterogeneously grouped, including most intellectual, emotional, sensory, and physical variables, then clearly her problems are of a different order.

The trend in special education is toward a policy of rapid integration of mildly or moderately disabled children into the regular classroom. The movement toward multi-age grouping, open classrooms, and other varieties of mixed grouping will call for drastic changes in the librarian's repertoire due to the extended heterogeneity of user groups.

Accordingly, Louisiana State University in New Orleans has

expanded its offerings in Library Science by developing a course on library services for the exceptional child. This course is designed to explore the implications of exceptionality specifically as they affect library practice. Mentally retarded, visually impaired, socially maladjusted, learning disabled, slow learning, auditorily handicapped, and academically gifted and creative children make special demands on a library program. Children with speech handicaps have not been included here because few, if any, adaptations need to be considered for this group. Culturally deprived or disadvantaged children have also been excluded because they comprise so large a group of students (in many schools being the norm rather than the exception) that their needs are routinely considered in standard library science professional preparation curricula.

Each area obviously has its unique considerations. However, for most areas, the following problems are explored:

1. <u>The nature of the exceptionality and the implications for learning</u>.

The educable retarded child, by definition, will be delayed in the initial acquisition of academic skills and can be expected to learn at a slower rate compared with his normal age-peers. Multiple opportunities for review and reinforcement need to be planned as well as an extensive collection of high-interest and low reading level books and magazines. The intellectually advanced child, on the other hand, is often ready for academic experiences at an early age, learns quickly, is bored with frequent repetition of material and may have both interests and a reading level higher

than the usual top level in the library. Because of his deficits in the acquisition of speech and language, the deaf child can be expected to be considerably behind his age mates in comprehension and communication skills, modifications in materials and practices are obviously a necessity. The impact of these developmental and learning problems on library procedures is analyzed and the nature and extent of what adaptations are essential are examined in this course.

2. Objectives of library service for exceptional children.

Not only must the library provide curricular support for the academic program, but it must develop and promote opportunities for each child to explore his own personal interests and achieve the insights about himself and his world that books can help to provide. For the socially maladjusted child, books may reveal the knowledge that he is not the only one who has faced certain pressures and frustrations. The substantitive content may suggest sources of motivation for human conduct (specifically his own) and may even provide non-threatening models for alternate strategies in coping behavior. This is not to suggest that the librarian will function as a psychologist or social worker, however, it is vital that she be alert to the therapeutic potential of the library.

3. Physical plant considerations.

Manipulation of the physical environment by the librarian is of crucial importance if she is to provide adequate service to the physically disabled. Librarians need to consider the problems of access to the library itself and to the materials within the library for children confined to wheel chairs. Limited access

requires dependence on others and may result in the orthopedically disabled child's reluctance to utilize the library facilities at all. Carpeted areas and the absence of protruding devices must be considered for children who may be likely to injure themselves. In addition, blind children need to have objects remain in fixed positions. The hyperactive child needs areas which will screen out external stimuli and keep him from over-responding to distractions.

4. Special equipment.

The variety of equipment necessary for the exceptional child is extensive. The librarian should know what is available and where technical evaluations of equipment can be found. In addition to acquiring knowledge about the varieties of amplified listening devices for the hearing impaired, talking book machines, prisms and magnifiers for the visually impaired, reading stands, page turners, and other self-help devices for the physically disabled, the librarian needs to bring critical judgement to bear on the purchase and use of other equipment which has the qualities of flexibility, durability, portability and the most automatic operation possible.

5. Sources and criteria for learning materials.

Some materials have been expressly designed for use with exceptional children, e.g. captioned films for the deaf, large type and brailled books for the visually impaired. Other materials, although not specifically designed for the special child, either have characteristics which make them potentially appropriate or are easily modifiable. Multi-mode instruction is especially

feasible within the library; tape recordings of favorite stories, for example, can be used by the mentally retarded child as he visually follows the story in the book. Tapes are an ideal source of auditory reinforcement. Three dimensional mock-ups, having well defined internal and external parts, can be an excellent informational source for children with perception problems as well as for some visually impaired children. Librarians must be cognizant of the multitude of sources for loan materials such as the Special Education Instructional Materials Center networks, the American Printing House for the Blind, the special collections available through ERIC, and agencies which will provide instructional printed materials, films, and tapes.

6. Library Programs.

The major component of any library program is the quality of the service which it provides. Special adaptations are required as standard procedures for the special child. The gifted child should be encouraged towards maximum growth in intellectual pursuits. In order to attain a high degree of self-direction, he must be taught to use the library at an early age. He must also be encouraged to engage in the more sophisticated mental activities of analysis, comparison and interpretation. For the socially maladjusted, experiences which stimulate expression and externalization of his problems, possibly through such "safe" procedures as puppetry or dramatics, (common practices by the creative librarian) have special value. In many of the more progressive psychiatric hospital schools, the librarian is an important and integral member of the psychoeducational therapeutic team.

7. Supportive community agencies.

It is imperative that the librarina be aware of the sources for help in the community for her own needs as well as for those of the staff, the children and their parents. Agencies can provide referral services, financial assistance, special equipment and informational services. Most local agencies are extremely cooperative about lending materials usable for professional staff growth, parent-teacher programs, etc.

8. Professional literature.

It is essential for the librarian to obtain for herself and for the staff current data on topics relating to exceptional children. Clearly, review of new programs and materials for the special child can have a direct impact on prevailing educational practice in the schools.

9. Integrating function.

Because of the high-use, high interaction aspect of the library, provision for the exceptional child in a normal, non-dramatic but appropriate manner, will undoubtedly affect the cognitive and affective perception of the average child toward the child who has unusual needs. He is able to observe the special child integrated into the school library program with ease and is exposed to an example of acceptance rather than exclusion of the different child.

The librarian can play an important role in this process. She can be a decisive agent in the growth of the professional staff and on the policies and programs of the school though her knowledge of sources of relevant information and instructional media and devices. Her major impact, however, will be upon meeting the so often neglected needs of the exceptional child.

This course then, attempts to explore these problems and arrive at practical approaches to their solution.